THE

COTTAGER'S SABBATH.

THE COTTAGER'S SABBATH,

A Poem

BY SAMUEL MULLEN



WITH SEVENTEEN STEEL VIGNETTES,

ENGRAVED BY W. R. SMITH, FROM DESIGNS BY H. WARREN

LONDON:
THOMAS MILLER, 9, NEWGATE STREET
MDCCCXLI.

London:
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY, Old Bailey.

PREFACE.

My principal object in the following pages has been to delineate the simple manners of cottage-life, as it is still to be found in some of the rural districts of England, where the happiest portion of my own days has been spent. The language employed is purposely simple, being more fitted to the ideas than words of loftier sound; while the incidents and characters introduced, are copied with the closest fidelity from real life. If there be one thing more than another connected with this subject, on which I feel proud, it is the happiness of living in a country where so many men are found who embody in

their lives the soundest practical morality with the most exalted yet unpretending piety. To those who recognise the inseparable connexion between virtue and peace, I leave the fate of THE COTTAGER'S SABBATH.

London, Nov. 15, 1841.

CANTO I.



Beside a lane, diverging from a wood,
Where tall tree-tops o'er-roof'd the grassy way,
A white-washed Cot in calm seclusion stood,
And, sloping down to face the southern ray,
Before the door a well-stocked garden lay;
Clean-weeded beds by winding walks outspread,
Where household roots were ripening day by day,
And blossomed beans delicious perfume shed,
While fruit-trees bending low, arched closely overhead.

II.

All round the place a look of comfort beamed,
True English comfort, homely, calm and sweet!
The very trees amid their stillness seemed
With quiet joy their leafy friends to meet,
And on the roses smiled beside their feet:
The shaded lane—the soft and balmy air—
The breath of flowers new-waked the morn to greet,
All seemed so pure, so innocent, and fair,
That in such scenes as these, man never need despair.

III.

Along the walls sweet-scented creepers hung,
Nailed here and there, their fragile stems to stay;
And after rain the gentle breezes flung
Such floating fragrance far across the way,
As lured the bees from distant fields to stray;
A rustic porch with straggling woodbine dressed,
And blooming roses, made the cottage gay;
While near at hand, the plum-tree's welcome guest,
Three Summers undisturbed, a thrush had built her nest.

IV.

In two small plots with border-box hemmed round,
Rare healing plants and choicest pot-herbs grew ;
The garden-balm, 'mid village dames renowned,
And fragrant thyme, its rich aroma threw
O'er mint, and white-leaved sage, and bitter rue.
Not far from these, the straw-thatched beehives stood,
Where in and out, all day incessant flew
The labouring bees, so bent on public good,
That idlers none disgraced that busy neighbourhood.

V.

A small round pond with flag-stones roughly lined,
Was scooped with care beneath the sloping hill,
From whence a rippling brook was taught to wind,
O'er jutting stones, in many a mimic rill,
With plashing sound the little pond to fill :
A grassy margin hemmed the water round,
No outlet seen the wasting waves to spill,
For by a sluice beneath a rustic mound,
The water glided through a passage under ground.

VI.

One quiet spot—a sweet secluded nook,
Displayed a seat of strong, rough-rinded oak,
Where, at his ease, with some instructive book,
The Cotter oft his evening-pipe would smoke,
And meditate on Heaven, or God invoke.
There clustering nuts and long thin filberts hung,
Beneath the leaves which served their youth to cloak;
While overhead the broad-leaved branches swung,
To which in knotted heaps the juicy walnuts clung.

VII.

In useless spots, or round about the fence,
Wild roses grew, or scented eglantine;
But every part which labour could compense,
Was made productive in a different line,
And oft might help the family to dine.
Here currants mixed with gooseberries did grow,
Or scarlet runners might be seen to twine
Their long thin tendrils tapering from below,
Round rods which rose aloft, in many a goodly row.

VIII.

Behind the cot a wooden shed was reared,
Where, safely housed, two hornless cows reposed ;
And near the pump a low warm sty appeared,
In which the well-fed pig supinely dosed
Thro' half the day, his drowsy eyelids closed.
With nicest skill the cottage-roof was thatched,
Its homely walls of quarry-stone composed;
The simple door with string and bobbin matched
Inside the roomy porch, showed it was wooden-latched.

IX.

Two little fields of twice five acres lay
Beyond the pales which formed the garden fence;
In one was seen a stack of new-made hay,
Unthatched as yet, until the layers dense
Had settled free from inward heats intense.
Tall thriving wheat the other field displayed,
And young potatoes, grown at small expense,
With rows of fruit-trees in long lines arrayed,
From which, in former years, his rent the Cotter paid.

X.

But now the fields and cottage were his own,
With all the trees that in the hedge-rows grew;
And in his humble history might be shown
The safest course a good man can pursue,
To raise his state, and still be just and true:
For he was one whose calm reflective mind
Ambitious thoughts and feelings could subdue;
In each event, to Providence resigned,
His ever cheerful heart some cause for praise could find.

XI.

Time was when he in thriftless trifles spent
Each hard day's earnings as the day rolled o'er,
Without regarding how his money went,
Quite sure, when all was gone, of earning more,
As he had done so many times before:
A fit of sickness taught him to reflect,
And made him feel the curse of being poor,
For those he 'd helped now blamed him for neglect,
And wondered one like him should aid from them expect.

XII.

To health restored, he fixedly resolved
To take his course, whatever might impede;
For while he lay, his labouring thoughts revolved
The various plans, by which he might succeed,
In future straits to save himself from need:
And thus at last his judgment did decide,
On no account his income to exceed,
But ere his wants or wishes were supplied,
A tenth of all he gained should first be laid aside.

XIII.

This simple rule he always kept in mind,
Altho' his means in narrow compass lay,
Yet by degrees he soon began to find,
That trifling sums, increasing day by day,
Would "tell up" fast if none were ta'en away.
The first five years twice twenty pounds he saved—
All clearly gained—no backward debts to pay;
His future means, on this foundation paved,
More ample soon became, and yielded all he craved.

XIV.

But not alone this steady path through life
Had he pursued, nor single-handed throve;
The cordial labours of his frugal wife
Sustained his mind and testified her love;
In heart united both together strove:
While he toiled hard to till their "bit of land,"
She spun the yarn which into shirts they wove;
His simple meals by her contrivance planned,
Were always nicely done, and ready to his hand.

XV.

And thus for more than one-and-twenty years,
Without a jar they journeyed on through life:
If e'er he drooped, she soothed away his fears;
If she repined, he calmed her mental strife,
For both were wise—the husband and the wife.
Four healthy boys and two fine girls they had,
Five still at home, but one with promise rife
Had gone abroad; a dark-eyed fearless lad,
More thoughtless than they wished, but still they hoped not bad.



One Sabbath morn—(while yet the earth was spread
With lingering mists—the gray sky tinged with gold,
Dull vapours coiling round each green hill's head,
And indistinct the deep broad river rolled
Its dusky length along the marshes cold;
While yet the worm still revelled in the dew,
The fleecy flock yet sleeping in the fold,
Ere twice the cock his early matins crew)—
Two younger boys he took, the rising sun to view.

XVII.

For they had heard a village playmate say,
How once a-year the sun danced in the sky;
That when he rose betimes the longest day,
In curious lines and rapid whirls he'd fly,
And gambol up and down before the eye.
'Tis strange how wide such notions still prevail
In rural glens, where scattered hamlets lie,
Each nursing up some legendary tale,
By old tradition spread through many an English dale.

XVIII.

When first his boys brought home this legend gray,
He only smiled, and said, "We'll rise and see!"
Because he judged that in such errors lay
Some lofty truth hard struggling to get free,
Or moral deep, with reason to agree:
And at the least this lesson he could teach—
That facts, not words, their only guides should be;
Lest, when their lives more dangerous years should reach,
They might neglect the truth for man's deceitful speech.

XIX.

To test this tale, they now approached a hill,
From whose high summit they could best behold
The glorious sun rise up serene and still,
Or else perform, as they were lately told,
His curious dance. in merry circles rolled.
Not much they talked while journeying on their way,
But watched to see the gates of light unfold,
Where amber clouds like half-drawn curtains lay,
Festooned in ample folds around the couch of day.

XX.

O'er bright green fields, now thickly pearled with dew,
From whence the mists in straggling columns broke,
Like flying troops, unfolding to the view
The distant woods, where many a sturdy oak
Still stood erect, unfeared the woodman's stroke;
Across a meadow, where the full-grown grass
In ridgy swathes a plenteous crop bespoke;
Then o'er a brook with rustic bridge they pass,
And reach an inland lake, with surface smooth as glass.

XXI.

Thin vapoury flakes were steaming from the lake,
Presaging sultry heat the coming day;
Unheeding this, along its banks they take
In lengthy sweeps their undulating way,
Until they reached the lofty hill, which lay
In rugged slopes based firmly far and wide,
And coated o'er with moss and lichens gray;
While here and there were jutting from its side,
Huge fragments of hard rock that would till doomsday bide.

XXII.

A zigzag path worn bare by hardy sheep,
With frequent bends wound gently up the hill;
Along this path and in a line they keep,
The youngest first, to please his anxious will;
Who, proud and glad this honoured post to fill,
With looks elate before them sped apace;
But soon, his breath exhausted, he stood still
With heaving chest, yet to avoid disgrace,
He stooped to pluck some flowers and then resumed his race.

XXIII.

And thus they gained the summit, ere the sun
Above the horizon showed his glorious face;
Though lines of light like streams of glory run
In sheeted splendour brightening near the place
Where he would first commence his upward race.
A solemn silence stilled the earth and sky,
As if great Nature's heart had paused to trace
That wondrous scene unfolded to the eye,
Where, stamped in living lines, bright proofs of Godhead lie.

XXIV.

Majestic, slow, the red round sun uprose,
Unlike aught earthly!—simple!—grand!—divine!
His Maker's image fashioned to disclose,
To spread through Time truth's everlasting line;
Of God unseen, the bright transparent sign!
Then Nature breathed more freely than before,
The dewy earth threw incense on his shrine,
The solemn trees a look of gladness wore,
And songs of laughing flowers each passing zephyr bore.

XXV.

With hands upraised to overshade their eyes,
The boys both gazed intently on the sun;
Serenely calm they then beheld him rise,
And anxious watched to see the dance begun,
Until their eyes were forced his rays to shun.
Half blind, they felt imprinted on their view
Fictitious orbs, that still before them spun
In rapid whirls, and quickly changing hue,
Now crimsoned o'er like blood, now yellow, green, or blue.

XXVI.

Some minutes passed ere they again could bear,
To turn their eyes to view that brilliant light,
Nor could they then, without reluctance, tear
Away the pleasing hope that yet he might
Some tricks perform before their eager sight:
But when with stolen oft-repeated glance,
They found him mounting high the azure height,
And still pursue his steady calm advance,
They both at once exclaimed, "The sun does never dance!"

XXVII.

"The sun does dance, my boys," the Cotter said,
"Though not as you had vainly hoped to see:
His steady course through endless circles led,
Is fixed for ages by that firm decree
Which made the rolling planets first agree.
Were he to move, eccentric, round and round,
This reeling earth, from his attraction free,
Would rush confused beyond its present bound;
And, dashing wild through space, the neighbouring stars
confound.

XXVIII.

"Yon glowing orb is one of many more
As large and bright as that we now behold;
By night, like stars, we see them sprinkled o'er
The vast blue sky—that book of lettered gold,
Of wisdom full, which time may yet unfold.
Those stars are suns, each rolling in his course—
In order ranged, by that same hand controlled,
Which made them all, himself of light the source,
Concerning whom the stars the livelong night discourse.

XXIX.

"But while we live on this small earth below,
We cannot see the sun's extended round;
Till heaven is gained, 'tis not for man to know
The splendid sights with which the heavens abound,
Where suns and stars are all with glory crowned.
But when we stand on heaven's high hills divine,
And fling our vision through the vast profound—
Our piercing sight shall reach the endless line,
Where, like these dewdrops thick, the countless planets shine"

XXX.

"Oh! had I wings," exclaimed the elder boy;
"To catch the glorious sun I 'd quickly fly,
My panting heart would be so full of joy,
To mount aloft, and live in that blue sky,
Far, far above yon lark, that soars so high."
"You may live there, my son," the father cried,
"And will, if you are good, and truly try
To copy Him who once on Calvary died
To raise you to that sky, and throne you by his side."

XXXI.

The boys both gazed with pleasure in their eyes,
While thus their father to their ears addressed
Those holy truths he wished them most to prize,
Which swayed for aye his own contented breast,
His guide through life, in death his only rest.
But evermore their youthful spirits wild
Broke out in strange remarks or joyful cries;
A bird—a flower—a wall with stones ill-piled,
Provoked their ready mirth: the good man turned and smiled.

XXXII.

To curb the mind with needless rules, he thought
Might chafe their spirits till they ceased to feel
Those pure emotions gushing forth unsought,
Like hidden springs which rocks would fain conceal,
Till bursting streams their secret strength reveal.
To guide their feelings safely as they rose,
And sway the heart by virtue's first appeal,—
More lasting good he trusted would disclose,
Than if on rigid laws he taught them to repose.

XXXIII.

But now 'twas time to think of going back,
For here and there the smoke from chimneys rose;
The sun was rising on his brilliant track,
And bees were busy where the wild thyme grows.
In far-off fields the congregated crows
Discussed affairs with signs of warm debate,
Or heaved loose grassy sods which might disclose
The sleeping worm, awaked to sudden fate,
And writhing to escape; but, ah! alas! too late.

XXXIV.

So down the hill, and by the lake they went,
A different way to that by which they came;
In pleasant chat the happy hour was spent,
On various subjects needless here to name,
Except to note the Cotter's constant aim
To lead their opening minds in search of truth;
For well he knew their after-life would claim
Its tone and hue, from what they learned in youth—
As saplings rise erect, or grow in forms uncouth.



Thus when they passed a proud baronial hall,
With spreading wings and towers that pierced the sky,
For miles surrounded by a lofty wall,
Its owner's lordly pomp to gratify,
And hide its beauty from the curious eye:
The boys both wished a house like that their own,
A park as large, a great stone wall as high,
Where they might live in grandeur all alone,—
Then would they never mind the king upon his throne.

XXXVI.

"Nor need you mind the king upon his throne,"
The father said, "nor yet desire to gain
Such great estates as this man calls his own,
Which often yield less happiness than pain,
And make men sigh for absent peace in vain.
When we reflect how hard 'twill be to part
With these grand halls, and wealth's imposing train,
We may conclude 'tis far the wiser art
To seek what all may find,—a calm contented heart.

XXXVII.

"Once on a time there lived a mighty king,
Who wished to bow the wide world to his sway,
So forth he sprang—an eagle on the wing—
To war on kings and make their thrones his prey,
Destroying nations in his bloody way.
When all were conquered,—all, on every side,
And no man lived who dared his word gainsay,
The grasping wretch was still dissatisfied,
And wanting something more, he like a baby cried."

XXXVIII.

Whereat the boys, half wondering, wished to know
Why he should weep when thus possessed of all —
When at his bidding men must come and go,
And all the world before his feet must fall,
With boundless wealth and pleasure at his call?
"Because," their father said, "he hoped to find
The honey grow, where God has placed the gall:
A foolish man, whose dark and erring mind
Would fill his hungry maw by feeding on the wind.

XXXIX.

"Not in the glare and glitter of great wealth,
Nor that which wealth produces, pomp and state,
Nor yet in power conferred or got by stealth,
Nor yet in fame or rank, however great,
Hath God confined the bliss of man's estate;
All these possessed, can never give repose,
Or charm the stinging conscience to abate
The dreadful stripes she evermore bestows
Upon the guilty soul with still increasing woes.

XL.

"All true enjoyment lies in man's own mind,
Depending not on pomp or outward things;
A lowly heart by heavenly grace refined,
Unceasing joy to its possessor brings,
And o'er his life unclouded sunlight flings;
Unruly passions banished from the breast,
With patient faith he bears the ill which clings
To human life, believing God knows best,
Submissive to his will, and with his fear imprest.

XLI.

"On yonder cliff see that gigantic oak,
All torn and rifted, battling with the wind;
Its huge long arms are peeled and crashed and broke,
While ghastly rents deform its blighted rind,
And fibres rot where once the ivy twined:
'Twere better far that stately tree had grown
In some low vale surrounded by its kind,
Than placed aloft in surly state alone,
Where, blasted by the storm, its pride lies overthrown.

XLII.

" All things, save man, contented with their lot,
Fulfil the task appointed them to do:
See how the bees toil on, complaining not,—
The careful ants the sultry summer through,
Prepare their wintry food, with caution due:
The cheerful birds their merry voices raise,—
The various beasts their various ends pursue;
Bird, beast, fish, insect, in ten thousand ways
Rejoice to do his will, and thus their Maker praise.

XLIII.

" But foolish man, with lofty reason blest,
Forgets its use in pining discontent,—
To-morrow's ills his present joys infest;
In idle wish each useful hour is spent,
Or labours vain, abundance to augment:
True wisdom shows a far superior plan,
That we should make the best of what is sent,
Do, while we live, whatever good we can,
And bear with cheerful thoughts the common lot of man."

XLIV.

'Twas thus the Cotter chatted with his boys,
As on their homeward way they gently strolled,
Oft loitering slow to hear the pleasant noise
Made by a little brook, that onward rolled,
O'er pebbly beds and sand that shone like gold:
Sometimes they stopped to catch the distant trill
Of larks unseen, whose merry music told
With what delight their little hearts must thrill,
Since thus their joyous songs the vaulted sky could fill.

XLV.

And as they passed along their pleasant way,
By hill or dale, or long, green, sweeping lane,
Full many a cot and scattered farm-house lay,
Securely resting on the smiling plain,
By fields surrounded full of various grain:
From each lone house a thin blue smoke was seen
To rise quite straight,—a certain sign the rain
That day would not bedim the sky serene,
Or with their evening walk, unwelcome intervene.

XLVI.

A gipsy-camp beside a wood they passed,
Whereby a heap of smouldering ashes lay,
On which large logs of half-dried wood were cast,
To keep the fire from burning all away,
While they reposed till later in the day.
The tents all closed, no signs of life revealed,
Save growling dogs which warned them not to stay;
Beneath a hedge their panniers lay concealed,
And three strong asses fed within a neighbouring field.

XLVII.

The farmer's horses, for the day set free,
With heavy gambols frisked about the grass—
The farmer's boys laughed loud their freaks to see,
Or cracked rough jokes with neighbouring servant lass,
Or peeled long sticks their idle hours to pass.
In new-washed frock each shone, and showy vest,
A kerchief flaming as his sun-burned face—
Large gaudy flowers stuck high upon his breast,
Straw hat and tight-laced boots that half his leg comprest.

XLVIII.

A rustic youth, with leave to spend the day
Among his friends, they met upon the road,
Just where his sweetheart waited in his way
With blushing cheeks, and modest eyes which glowed
In bashful joy, as he the kiss bestowed.
Her russet gown was plain and neatly made,
A single bow her cottage bonnet showed;
A kerchief blue across her shoulders laid,
Half opened in the front, her snowy neck displayed.

XLIX.

With looks of love and simple joy they went,
Her arm in his, exulting side by side;
A happy picture of that calm content,
Which causes life in quietness to glide,
When lowly thoughts extinguish foolish pride.
My blessing on them! Happy may they be!
(Let not the great their humble state deride),
With love unbroken may they live to see
Their children's children rise, and climb the old man's knee.



And through the fields they saw the milkmaid trip,
Her rustic songs unsung this holy day,
Her gown tucked up—the pail placed on her hip,
With airy steps she trod her dewy way,
Just stopping as they passed "good morn" to say.
Her rosy cheeks, her laughter-loving eyes,
Full pouting lips, and firm round limbs display—
What cheerful health the early morn supplies!
To those who labour love, and with the lark arise.

LI.

Beside the road a ruined abbey stood,
Its roofless walls with ivy overgrown;
The crumbling stones and richly carven wood,
Were here and there about the pathway strown,
In scattered heaps, while fragments lay alone.
One lofty arch, yet perfect, served to show
How great the shock, by which were overthrown
This goodly structure, now in ruin low,
And Rome's imperial pride, with one gigantic blow.

LII.

Their path led onwards by a little brook,
That swept with mimic fury down a dell,
Thence round a hill a further circuit took,
And met the stream, where, with a sudden swell,
Heaved o'er a rock with brawling noise it fell.
Then in a tiny lake the water lay,
Calm, clear, and cold, cooped in its rocky shell,
As if content upon its course to stay,
And rest in that cool place, throughout the Sabbath day.

LIII.

Beyond this lake, fixed on the sloping hill,
By lofty trees half hidden from the view,
They passed a rustic antiquated mill,
Where all the water of the stream came through
To turn a wheel, that turned with much ado.
But now the wheel was idle, for the stream
Was taught a different passage to pursue,
Till that day past, of all the days supreme,
Wherein poor mortals may, their mis-spent time redeem.

LIV.

Descending deeper through a rocky glen
With hoary moss and ivy overgrown,
They passed a cave, called "Rip the Robber's den,"
Wherein, tradition said, he lived alone,
For many a year his wild retreat unknown.
In long dark nights his daring deeds were done,
In secret planned—the act—the gain, his own;
And while he thus, detection cared to shun,
An easy life he lived—believing, fearing none.

LV.

At length, the story said, he went and stole
A mass of money from a rich old man,
And bore it off in safety to his hole—
O'erjoyed that such success had crowned his plan.
But when to count the treasure he began,
A sudden noise his guilty breast alarmed;
With eager haste to get his gun he ran,
But ere he turned with this destructive armed,
A blow upon his wrist his fatal purpose charmed.

LVI.

That old man had a daughter, and she loved
A youth, her father wished her not to love;
By night, he oft beneath her window moved,
To watch her shadow o'er the curtains move—
To heave long sighs and adverse fate reprove.
That night he watched the robber stealing by,
And dogged his steps, half jealous, to the cove;—
The old man smiled and bade the youth draw nigh—
And ere the thief was hung, the bridal songs rose high.

LVII.

They left the glen, and by a grassy knoll
With quicker pace their homeward way ran o'er,
Now hungry grown by this long morning's stroll,
They took the path that lay straight on before,
For sight or sound resolved to stop no more;
O'er gate, or hedge, or roughly-shapen stile,
Through half-formed gaps or brambles wild they tore,
Despite large boards with prohibitions vile,[2]
They tripped the nearest way, which saved them full a mile.

LVIII.

And so at last they reached that quiet lane,
Wherein their own sweet cottage they could see,
And near the gate they saw their sisters twain,
And their young brother frisking like a bee,
Then bounding off to meet them, full of glee.
With eager joy the boys beheld him come,
And sprang to meet him, shouting "Here we be!"
While, with a heart that never wished to roam,
The Cottage-Father came rejoicing to his home.

LIX.

The anxious wife was waiting near the door,
And round her husband's neck her arms she threw,
With fond regard she welcomed him once more;
While he more closely to his bosom drew
His long-tried friend, in every trial true;
Not theirs the love that cooled with marriage ties,
The longer tried the firmer fixed it grew;
They still were dearest in each other's eyes,
And deemed each other's smile by far the greatest prize.

LX.

The girls too came both clinging round their sire,
To gain in turn the long-accustomed kiss;
For haply on the altar no strange fire
Had yet been lighted to destroy their bliss,
Or wake the sigh for other joy than this.
Wife, daughters, boys, all crowding round him, strove
Who first should gain (quite sure that none would miss)
That warm embrace which daily served to prove
How fully they enjoyed his deep unceasing love.

CANTO II.



AND now the sun, in cloudless beauty bright,
Had warmed the earth, and half absorbed the dew,
Save where, with tapering shadows twice their height,
Large leafy trees a cool protection threw
O'er all the tender herbs that near them grew.
The Cotter, who was predisposed to find
New cause for praise in all which met his view,
Rejoicing, stayed a little while behind,
To breathe the grateful thoughts that swelled within his
mind.

II.

And well he might, for, stretched before his door,
Earth's richest scene, an English valley, lay,
With rural beauties thickly dotted o'er,
Farm-house and cot, and hedge-rows white with May,
And pastoral slopes in summer beauty gay;
A sparkling stream, rude bridge, and dusty mill,
Long winding road 'twixt meadows full of hay,
An old church-spire beyond the distant hill,—
All bathed in brilliant light, reposed serenely still.

III.

And here and there odd figures might be seen,
Such as a Sabbath morning only shows,
Who, though they move, scarce break that deep serene,
The Sacred day o'er all the country throws,
When man and beast alike enjoy repose.
Here rustic swains were leaning o'er a gate,
The village news to gather or disclose,
While o'er the bridge a farmer rode sedate,
And in her Sunday gear his wife displayed her state.

IV.

Meantime the Cotter's family went in,
A joyful group without a single care;
All eager now their breakfasts to begin,
They eyed with joy the plain substantial fare,
Then jointly ran to place their father's chair.
The youngest boy, with small unsteady feet,
Mixed with the rest this joyful task to share;
Then toddling off to fetch him to his seat,
Cried, "Father, pray come in, my brothers want to eat."

V.

All things inside bespoke the "day of rest,"
Made clean and "tidied up" the night before:
Their Sunday clothes then taken from the chest;
Their home-spun shirts were aired and well looked o'er;
Shoes, hats, and coats were brushed, and washed the floor.
The old dark wheel and distaff put away;
Hoops, bows, and kites, hung up behind the door:
Each thing removed that told of work or play,
Due preparation showed to keep the Sabbath day.

VI.

For they had learned that He to whom they owed
Their lives, and all that made their being blest,
To cheer mankind in mercy had bestowed
One day in seven, to be a day of rest
For weary man, with worldly toils opprest:
Wherefore to keep his law they ever strove,
And banished worldly feelings from the breast,
That thus they might the sacred Sabbath prove,
A day of holy rest, of peace, and joy, and love.

VII.

Across the room a straight-backed settle stood,
One end up-running to the chimney nook ;
A snug warm place when winter chills the blood,
And always cozey with its antique look,
Its overhanging shelf and iron crook.
On this the polished pot-hooks shining bright,
Reflected back the pains their mistress took
To make their home a source of true delight,
By keeping household things in merest trifles right.

VIII.

The warmest corner in that "chimney nook,"
The grandam held by long-acknowledged right;
Where, on a small old table, lay that Book
From whence she drew a strong interior light,
Which glowed more brightly with her fading sight:
There would she sit the long warm summer's day,—
There would she sit the long cold winter's night;
While evermore her Bible open lay,
In which at times she read, then knit her worsted grey.

IX.

Long had her husband lain within his grave,
And silent there her sons and daughters lay;
All, all were dead, except the one who gave
His sheltering roof, to shield her wintry day,
And loved her true, and wished her long to stay.
But oft the tear would gather in her eye,
As wakeful memory pictured those away;
Then would she smile, gaze dimly toward the sky,
And mutter to herself, "I'm coming by-and-bye."

X.

Along the rafters, from the ceiling hung
Well-seasoned herbs in various bunches tied;
Part kept because an odour rich they flung,
And more because a medicine they supplied,
But most of all, for seed thus housed and dried.
Here everlasting daisies bloomed with thyme,
There sage and rue hung closely side by side;
While marjoram sweet with wormwood rank did chime,
Mint, horehound, featherfew, and more, unknown to rhyme.

XI.

In good strong ropes two poles suspended hung,
Above the door and near the rafters placed,
From which in strings the home-fed flitches swung,
With hams and chaps and chines of bacon braced,
To keep from reist in coarse strong paper cased;
There rows of onions in their bright brown coats,
In netted cords were close together laced;
And in a nook where sunlight seldom floats,
A bin was snugly placed, well filled with meal and oats.

XII.

A thick old plate fixed fast in ebon frame,
Beside the window placed against the wall,
The honored post of looking-glass might claim,
Though slightly cracked and injured by a fall,
Had long before it left a baron's hall:
The salt-box clean, its round brass nails displayed,
Beside the homely dresser, long and tall,
Where pewter plates on narrow shelves were laid,
Without one speck of dirt their mistress to upbraid.

XIII.

Across the room outstretched the chimney wide,
Above a grate which stood upon the floor,
The shelf with brazen candlesticks supplied;
While bright pan-lids hung near the cupboard door,
A large old-fashioned thing with brass laid o'er.
There shone the pan to warm the chilly bed,
The grater rough with many a gaping pore,
A dredging box, the mealy flour to spread,
And toasting fork of steel to brown their home-made bread.

XIV.

A few old chairs, all odd, but sound and strong,
As if at sundry times picked up by chance,
Some quaintly carved, with backs upright and long,
And one that bore the royal arms of France,
Without the crown, knocked off by some mischance.
Behind the door there stood a brass-faced clock,
From which in turn two giants did advance,
With knotted clubs against the bell to knock,
While Time pursued his flight regardless of the shock.

XV.

A cat and two young kittens full of play,
With merry gambols romped about the floor;
An old Dutch mastiff in a corner lay,
And in a cage suspended near the door,
A speckled thrush his wild notes warbled o'er;
A jackdaw lamed, the elder boy had found,
And nursed him well till he was lame no more;
And when he called, the bird came hopping round,
And on his shoulder perched, or skipped about the ground.

XVII.

With cheerful looks they gathered round the board,
Good health and hunger pictured in each face;
But ere they ate, with reverence they adored,
A solemn silence filling all the place,
While, simply sweet, the youngest girl said grace;
The children each this office took in turn,
A week about, that they might early trace
How God is mingled in each small concern
On which our lives depend, and so to love him learn.

XVIII.

Then, with the relish hunger always feels,
And right good will they took their homely fare,
More thankful far for these substantial meals
Than many men for daintiest dishes are,
By wealth procured, and cooked with greatest care;
For soft luxurious habits had not spoiled
The appetites they gained from country air;
And though at times fatigued and sadly moiled,
Yet greatly they enjoyed the food for which they toiled.

XIX.

The breakfast o'er, the breakfast things removed,
And thanks returned by her who "grace" had said,
The pious father took the Book he loved,
And in a clear strong voice distinctly read
That part of holy writ, where Abraham led
His Isaac bound, the child of his old age,
On whom he gazed with mingled love and dread,
While journeying o'er that long dark pilgrimage,
In which his faith in God had made him first engage:

XX.

And how he laid him bound along the wood,
The big tears trembling as the victim smiled,
One hand upraised to shed his young warm blood—
His Isaac's blood—the long, long-promised child—
The nestling of his heart—the kind—the mild!
Oh! Faith, how strange is thy exalted power,
By thoughtless fools rejected or reviled!
The hungry knife shall not his life devour—
He lives!—he lives to shew thy most triumphant hour!

XXI.

In strains devout they then together raised
Their morning hymn to Abraham's God and friend;
With artless words his Providence they praised,
Which did through dangers of the night defend,
And shewed that they might still on him depend.
For all the mercies which his hands supplied
(And all their mercies did from God descend)
They still would praise and trust him for their Guide,
While sun, and moon, and stars, his goodness testified.

XXII.

Then kneeling down, with unaffected words
The father's voice in prayer devout arose;
With modest skill he touched those trembling chords
The human heart in every station knows,
When light divine its hidden weakness shows.
Poor nature's failings and her sins he wailed,
And strength besought temptation to oppose,
Expressed a doubt, that where the strong had failed,
The poor weak lambs must fall, unless their God prevailed.

XXIII.

But soon his prayer assumed a bolder tone,
And notes of triumph mingled in the strain;
He spoke of Christ,—his passion and his throne,—
His melting heart,—his touch of human pain,—
His power supreme, and everlasting reign!
And then his faith appeared to grasp the Cross,
And every moment firmer hold to gain,
Till worldly things were valueless as dross,
And life grew out of death, and gain arose from loss.

XXIV.

"Aye! let the winds howl fiercely round their bark,
The surges rise, the thundering tempest roll,
The sky weep blood, the sun and stars grow dark,
The earth in flames, convulsed from pole to pole;—
Yet what could harm the trusting Christian's soul?
Was not the arm omnipotent their shield?
Could not that arm both man and fiend control?
And had not He, to whom all creatures yield,
His boundless love to man in Jesus Christ revealed?"

XXV.

With thoughts and feelings far too high for words,
His heart-felt prayer in praises died away;
Delicious tones still trembling through the chords,
While broken visions in the distance lay,
In sunlight steeped, or glory's dim display.
The secret chambers of his heart were filled
With that pure light, whose everlasting ray
Descends from God, man's humble faith to gild,
And brighten o'er his hopes with ripening raptures thrill'd.

XXVI.

And now the time for Sunday school draws nigh,
Where both the boys and both the girls must go
To gain the truths, these useful means supply,
Through which in goodness they may learn to grow,
And live respected, though their lot be low;
Their father, now the leading teacher there,
Before the door is walking to and fro,
Whereby they know they have no time to spare,
And so for school at once both girls and boys prepare.

XXVII.

The boys, soon ready, reached their caps, and went
To join their father near the garden gate;
But o'er the girls a longer time was spent,
To smooth their frocks, and place their collars straight,
To tie their bonnets, and their frills to plait.
All this the anxious mother did with care,
And turned them round with looks of joy elate,
Then kissed their cheeks, and bade them both beware
Their bonnets not to soil, nor yet their garments tear.

XXVIII.

Outside the gate two cocks and many hens
Were cackling, scratching, pecking in the lane,
While some, with chickens placed in wicker pens,
Seemed quite content in durance to remain,
And teach their young to pick the golden grain.
The ducks and geese were splashing in a pool,
Made long before, their little field to drain,
Now mantled thick with duck-weed green and cool,
'Mid which the geese made sport, as *they* went off to school.

XXIX.

With cheerful looks, and garments whole and clean,
They left their home, and sauntered down the lane
To where the school stood on the village-green,
Well fenced around with strong oak-palings plain,
Each urchin rude from mischief to refrain.
It was an old Elizabethan pile,
Built long before, and destined to contain
Twelve scholars free, until a patron vile
With smooth and oily words, the parish did beguile.

XXX.

Not far from thence the Maypole could be seen,
On which still hung the branches and the flowers,
So lately used, but now no longer green;
For Time his loveliest children still devours,
And these, like men, have their appointed hours.
And yet, methinks these rustic customs throw
A graceful charm about our English bowers,
That other lands in vain attempt to show,
Which makes old Father Time with more reluctance go.



Around the green the village houses stood,
Some back to back were placed, some side by side,
These built of brick, and those of brick and wood;
Here high and tall, there low and straggling wide.
And some which all descriptive power defied,—
High gable ends with chimneys all awry,
And low thatched roofs with houseleek well supplied:
With here and there a dove-cot round and high
A cow-shed or a barn, a stable or a sty.

XXXII.

There stood the ale-house with its antique sign,
Whereon some waggish painter had portrayed
Three hogs in armour marching in a line,
As stiff and straight as if they knew the trade
Of cutting throats, like soldiers ready made.
By some 'twas thought the satire was designed
To show how men, by brutish passions swayed,
Had lost all strength and dignity of mind,
And sunk into the beast—mere hogs in armour shrined.

XXXIII.

Beside his house a blacksmith's forge appeared,
A low thatched building with an open shed;
Against the sides old crazy wheels were reared,
Or worn-out ploughs about the place were spread,
And one large weather-cock without a head;
Some lazy louts with rough unshaven chins
(The nuisance of each place where they are bred,)
Were skulking there, and kicked each other's shins,
Or gibed the passer-by with vulgar jests and grins.

XXXIV.

The shop wherein on week-days were exposed,
At door and window, various things for sale,
Demurely now all apertures had closed
That faced the road,—no sign of weight or scale;
But turn the corner—what a different tale!
There stands the man of measures and of weights,
On whom each lazy slattern can prevail
To weigh the snuff or serve a "pound of eights,"
While she some patched-up lie, with ready tongue relates.

XXXV.

And there, as if at least one-half ashamed,
The butcher's shop, had all the shutters closed,
Although the door wide open still proclaimed
How for his neighbour's welfare he exposed
His soul to hell with cheerful looks composed.
The baker too, refining further still,
Through half the door his willingness disclosed,
With eager haste, the hungry mouth to fill,
Provided they who came put money in the till.

XXXVI.

The carrier's cart, thick splashed with mire and clay,
With rampant shafts stood near its owner's door:
The load of sundries just removed away
He brought from town, too late the night before
To take them home, though promised o'er and o'er.
But carrier Joe so loved a jug of ale,
So often filled, and filled again once more,
Just while he heard, or while he told, a tale,
Till Joe quite tipsy grew, for Joe was rather frail.

XXXVII.

The village pinfold stood behind the school,
Where three old yews their heavy branches threw,
Which made the place in hottest summer cool,
And warm and snug, when wintry breezes blew.
And this was right, for those confined ne'er knew
The subtle claims of property and law;
And if they strayed where fresher herbage grew
'Twas but because they felt great nature draw
Her children to her breast, to fill their hungry maw.

XXXVIII.

The wooden stocks beside the pinfold stood,
Where petty rogues their lazy limbs reclin'd,
A sorry scene;—and yet for public good
These painful sights were all at first designed,
To show how closely sin and shame were twined.
There too the roundhouse built of coarse rough stone,
Wherein they kept those sturdy thieves confined,
Whose itching palms, to stealing ever prone,
Their honest neighbours' goods could never leave alone.

XXXIX.

Close by the school a little streamlet ran
Of clear spring-water, o'er its pebbly bed;
To which the village-maids with pot or pan,
Or brown stone jug, as fate or fancy led,
To fetch the sparkling fluid often sped.
And there young boys in summer days would wade,
Or splash their clothes which on the banks were spread;
Some, stretched supine, in lazy lengths were laid,
While some each other chased, or mimic tempest made.

XL.

Now o'er the green, beneath the sheltering trees,
From every side the village-children came
Here one by one, and there by twos and threes,
Of either sex, of various age and name,
All active things, save one, and he was lame.
Some tripped along like fairies o'er the green,
While others lagged like culprits full of shame;
And here and there a taller girl was seen
Her little sister's steps to tend with careful mien.

XLI.

The doors unlocked, the ardent boys rushed in,
With smiling faces jostling to and fro,
Each striving hard to gain the favourite pin
Whereon his hat or cap he might bestow—
The greatest triumph which he then might know.
And then the girls, more modest and more mild,
With gentle steps came in, each curtsying low
Before their teachers, who looked on and smiled,
Rejoicing in their task to teach the poor man's child.

XLII.

Just as the clock tolled forth the hour of nine,
The school began with simple strains of praise;
Exciting thus the children to combine,
The pleasant song of gratitude to raise
To God, whose kindness still prolonged their days;
Then kneeling down, a solemn prayer was made,
That He would guide them through life's winding ways,
In darkness cheer, in strong temptation aid,
And o'er them still to cast His all-protecting shade.

XLIII.

And then the labours of the school began;
The classes placed to cipher, or to write,
While younger groups about their teachers ran,
To spell or read, or weekly task recite,
Conned o'er and o'er, but yet not learned aright:
Others there were not higher than the knee,
Whose lisping tongues might well a smile excite,
As oft they tried to learn those letters three —
Great giants in their might, the wondrous A B C.

XLIV.

It was in sooth a very pleasant sight,
To cast the eye along that crowded place;
To watch the teachers anxious to invite
The youthful mind, with pleasing hopes, to trace
The path which leads to wisdom, truth, and grace;
To note the boys their various parts enact,
Demurely some, and some with strange grimace,
Afforded scope to guess how each would act,
When, on life's larger stage, life's things he must transact.

XLV.

One dark-eyed boy was laughing, full of glee,
Because his neighbour's hat had fallen down,
For he was one, who evermore could see
Some cause for fun; a very merry clown,
Who would laugh on, despite his teacher's frown:
And one sly rogue, mischievously inclined,
Placed on another's head a feathery crown,
Then leaning back, he pointed from behind,
To make the laughing boy new cause for laughter find.

XLVI.

An ardent youth, who far outstripped the rest,
Had fixed himself within a quiet nook,
With eager eye, his lip and brow comprest,
He sat absorbed and buried in his book;
Sometimes he gave a long and vacant look,
Where through a painted window streamed the light,
Then by and bye to read again betook,
As if each outward thing, however bright,
By that which filled his mind was blotted from the sight.

XLVII.

A pale-faced boy—a widow's only child,
Sat near the door, his long accustomed place;
With gentle haste he took his book and smiled,
As if he loved those precious lines to trace,
Where Prophets sung of God's redeeming grace;
His large blue eyes were radiant with delight,
Although disease had trailed along his face
Those awful lines, prophetic of the blight
His mother's heart must feel, to lose him from her sight.

XLVIII.

And some were there with dull and sleepy eyes,
Who never felt the animating fire
Which inborn genius to the heart supplies,
And prompts the struggling spirit to aspire
Where Fame exalts, and wondering crowds admire.
But those which formed by far the greatest class,
Had just enough of talent to acquire
The small amount of knowledge which would pass
Without distinguishment, amid the common mass.

XLIX.

And now, the school dismissed with praise and prayer,
About the green, in joyful groups they strolled,
For some few moments which they had to spare,
Before the bell its well-known music tolled,
Inviting all to church, both young and old.
Then pair by pair, each hand in hand, they passed
In ranks grotesque, from laughter scarce controlled,
Although their teachers long keen glances cast,
And viewing all the line the Cottager came last.



And while the deep bell through the village knolled,
From various parts the congregation came:
Here walked a pair, both venerably old,
There by herself a stooped and withered dame,
And next a cripple from his childhood lame.
Then household groups moved slowly o'er the green,
Or coy young girls with eyes cast down for shame,
While further on, amidst the woody screen,
The Squire's old roomy coach, and Doctor's gig were seen.

LI.

Around the village grew an ancient wood
A part of that huge forestry of old
Where Sherwood's hero, far-famed Robin Hood,
Upheld the freedom of those Saxons bold,
Who scorned the Norman's sway, and took his gold.
Yet history has not sullied their fair name,
Nor mixed them up with common thieves. They hold
The rank of patriots fighting to reclaim
The country they had lost!—Long live their honest fame!

LII.

One part of this old forest still remained,
Of hoary oaks a venerable grove;
Which all its antique majesty retained—
Its massy boughs, its stems by lightning clove,
Or mossy coat with clustering ivy wove.
And in the midst of this wild sylvan scene
An open space was sun-lit from above,
Where, calmly placed, the village church was seen,
Surrounded by a wall, adorned with creepers green.

LIII.

Before the porch a vast extensive yew,
Whose age extreme, tradition had forgot,
O'er half the graves its sombre shadow threw—
A needless boon; for those who lay to rot
The sunshine or the storm regarded not.
A strong oak seat rough-hewn, ran round the bole,
Placed there by one who loved this quiet spot;
Worm-eaten now, each legendary scroll
With rude devices grinned, half serious and half droll.

LIV.

A Gothic porch projected from the wall,
With loop-holes pierced and battlements complete;
One part disjointed, threatening soon to fall,
Where loosened stones protruding from their seat
Foretold how Time the builder would defeat.
From one huge rent a sapling ash had grown,
Its roots still nurtured in their dark retreat;
And as they grew, stone loosened after stone,
Until the tottering porch was partly overthrown.

LV.

The Church itself, a venerable pile,
Though very old, was yet exceeding clean:
Long narrow windows in the Gothic style,
Stuck here and there along the sides were seen,
With buttressed walls and massy flanks between.
A square stone tower now ivy-crowned by time,
Contained the bell, which had for ages been
Still pealing forth the same dull iron chime,
Whereby it noted, first, the march of years sublime.

LVI.

The walls inside with monuments were graced,
Where quaint inscriptions homely truths conveyed;
A large stone tomb, full in the centre placed,
Most eloquently spoke of hopes decayed
And withered hearts now mouldering in its shade.
One fine old tablet deeply carved, contained
The beggar's tale, who full of sores was laid
Beside the rich man's gate and ne'er complained,
Although the fallen crumbs oft asked, he never gained.

LVII.

Above the old oak altar, towards the East,
Quaint legendary tales in fragments shone
Disjointed and obscure; part like a feast,
And part like death—here crowns, and there a bone,
All things adverse in strange confusion strown.
As if odd portions of the rich-stained glass,
From abbeys burned, cathedrals overthrown,
Or ruined halls, here gathered in a mass,
Subserved a pious use, and showed how ages pass.

LVIII.

A low oak gallery ran from wall to wall,
Carved thickly o'er with many a grotesque face,
In whose grim looks we vainly would recall
Those distant days, where fancy loves to trace
The outlines dim of valour, beauty, grace.
While down below large roomy pews were ranged,
Where sons still worshipped in their father's place
From age to age, by families unchanged,
Save one "the stranger's pew"[3] from private use estranged.

LIX.

Along the walls old tablets dimly told
The age, the name, the virtues of the dead;
Each had some tale peculiar to unfold;
But all alike to one conclusion led, —
That man, at last, must death's dark valley tread:
The brave, the beautiful, the grave, the gay,
The warm young heart, the grey and hoary head,
In dull cold silence mixed together lay,
Life's poor distinctions lost, reduced to common clay.

LX.

But one small tablet, near the pulpit placed,
Seemed more attractive far than all the rest;
Its mournful tale was not in letters traced,
But shadowed forth in emblems which imprest,
With lasting force, their image in the breast:
Fixed on a slab of coal-black marble, lay
A thin white branch, with three fair rosebuds blest,
From which, the first in youthful beauty gay,
A sickle's slender edge had partly lopped away.

LXI.

This told the parson's story. He, poor man!
Long years before, a widower was made,
With three young daughters, in whose veins there ran
The same disease, that on their mother preyed,
By which he knew too well they all would fade:
And yet at times their youthful spirits rose
To such a height as they around him played,
That he forgot, what time would yet disclose,
Until some faint slight sign unsluiced his secret woes.

LXII.

Oft when he gazed with passionate delight,
On those fair forms just ripening into life,
Some turn would bring their mother to his sight,
And wake afresh the agony and strife
He first endured when parting from his wife:
And then his eyes with sudden tears grew dim,
His boding heart with dismal fancies rife,
While ghastly forms before him seemed to swim,
A sickness seized his heart and paralysed each limb.

LXIII.

Yet still he strove to banish from his mind
The fearful thought that all his girls must die;
With ceaseless care, he ever sought to find
Some cheerful scheme, to which they might apply,
And make old Time with lighter wings go by:
Now in the fields he 'd stray with them for hours,
Now in the woods to catch the birds they 'd try;
Then in their little garden, gathering flowers,
With which, with fairy hands, they decked their tiny bowers.

LXIV.

And thus they grew to womanhood, and one,
His eldest girl, was matchless in her mind
And in her form, till it had undergone
The withering process, which he feared to find
Was lurking thief-like all his hopes behind:
For many a month, he watched her day by day
Decrease in strength, but rise in soul refined,
Until at last her spirit broke away,
Half shining, ere it passed, transparent through the clay.

LXV.

And now he stood, a meek, mild, smitten man,
In holy things to minister for God;
With artless words he told the gracious plan,
How mercy used, and still would use the rod,
And lay the brightest flowers beneath the sod;
"And why, my friends, why is it thus," he cried,
"Why should our heavenly Father bruise the clod?
Because He would our souls from sin divide,
As gold by fire alone from dross is purified.

LXVI.

"Yet she was fair, as most of you can tell,
And good, beyond the telling of the tongue;
Forgive me, then, if my full heart should swell,
And from mine eyes these scalding tears be wrung,
To lose her thus, and she so good—so young!
Forgive me, Father, my torn heart is wild,—
I knew not this before,—how close she clung:
Thou hast her now—how beautiful, how mild;
I would not wish her back—Oh God, thou hast my child!"

LXVII.

With tears and sobs and oft-repeated sighs,
Both young and old her early death bewailed;
While o'er his griefs the parson seemed to rise,
As mightier faith within his breast prevailed,
And tore the curtains which her glory veiled:
"She lives!" he cried, "in circling beauty bright;
The rock is firm!—Jehovah hath not failed!
Be ours the care, to have our garments white,
And rise like her to shine—with Jesus throned in light."

LXVIII.

'Twas not in vain, the lesson of that day,
The tears were fruitful that bedewed the eye;
More hearts than one from thence began to pray,
And fit themselves for mansions in the sky,
Now conscious of the truth, that each must die:
So Mercy lights the overwhelming gloom
Of Death's black shadows which around us lie;
While Hope survives the universal doom,
And Life immortal shows transparent through the tomb.

CANTO III.



THE service o'er, the congregation gone,
Behind the rest the pastor lingered still,
That simple tablet by himself to con,
Although it waked afresh each bitter thrill,
And shook his soul with fears of future ill:
Yet still he gazed half-shuddering at the sight,
Till, kneeling down, he cried, "Oh God! thy will,
Not mine be done: I know thy ways are right;
Forgive me if I mourn;—she was so pure and bright."

II.

Meanwhile towards home the Cottager returned,
With all his children clustering by his side;
Except the youngest, who from grandam learned
Behind the rest, how Christ for sinners died,
By wicked men on Calvary crucified.
His little eyes were full of tears, while she
Related how his wounds were gaping wide,
And the red blood came streaming down the tree
Where they had nailed him fast, a piteous sight to see.

III.

Along the lane near which their cottage stood,
They sauntered slowly homeward in the shade,
Oft catching glimpses through the opening wood,
Where snugly screened their own sweet cottage made
The fairest picture in the sun-lit glade:
A thick white smoke above the chimney rolled,
In larger masses than was oft displayed;
A sight the boys were happy to behold,
For well they knew this sign the dinner-time foretold.

IV.

Nor did they long with blank impatience wait,
Although they all for grandam had to stay,
Where poor old Pug was near the garden gate,
And watched them come, then went a little way
And wagged his tail, as if he meant to say,
"I'm glad you 're come. Excuse me, I am old,
Or else, be sure, I 'd meet you blithe and gay:
My limbs are stiff, by numbing age controlled,
But yet it warms my heart, your faces to behold."

V.

With features flushed from toiling near the fire,
The wife smiled kindly as they all came in;
She bade the girls fold up their best attire,
The boys to hang their caps on nail or pin,
But first to wipe their shoes and make no din:
Her husband's hat she then herself removed,
Delighted most that smiling look to win,
By which she knew how fully he approved
Each action of her life, and still sincerely loved.

VI.

Placed on a cloth which her own hands had spun,
The dinner smoked inviting to the taste;
A chine of bacon boiled was nicely done,
Not over large, midway 'twixt thrift and waste,
With young green peas and new potatoes graced;
A large hot pie, with fresh-pulled berries filled,
Displayed its round of good substantial paste,
Which showed how well the thrifty wife fulfilled
The duties of her place, in household matters skilled.

VII.

But more than all, the children's eyes were cast
Where on a dish a large plum-pudding lay,
Not over-rich, yet richer than the last
Which they had seen, twelve months before that day,
For only once a-year such things had they:
And this was made in memory of the son
Who by the soldiers had been lured away,
And now in foreign countries bore a gun,
Where he must still remain, until the war was done.

VIII.

And three long tedious years had passed away,
And brought no tidings to the parents' ears;
What could they do, but trust in God, and pray
For his return in penitential tears,
With mended life to cheer their latter years.
A neighbour's son, since then enlisted, went,
And from the mother, still oppressed with fears,
He bore a Bible with her blessing sent,
And many an earnest prayer, that George would yet repent.

IX.

And so whene'er the soldier's birth-day came,
The large plum-pudding on the board was seen;
And oft they wished "poor George" might share the same,
And come again to tell where he had been,
Fighting the French in many a bloody scene.
Affection thus, and hope were kept alive,
Though dismal fears at times would intervene;
Lest, after all, their son should not survive
The dangers of the war, or e'er at home arrive.

X.

Now when their meal was finished, and the grace,
They ne'er forgot, was said in fervent strain;
The girls began to straighten up the place;
The mother to remove what might remain
Till needed next, at supper time again.
The father went the pig and cows to feed,
The boys to give the fowls the looked-for grain;
While to the porch the grandam did proceed,
To teach the little boy his picture-book to read.

XI.

These useful labours all despatched, they came
With clean-washed hands, and faces fresh and fair:
A blue-checked apron on the frugal dame,
A clean white cap above her flaxen hair;
And close beside her in his little chair
The youngest boy now sat, with serious look,
While one by one the rest in turn repair
To read a portion of that sacred book,
Whose truths refreshed the soul like Siloa's silent brook.

XII.

It chanced that day the portion which they read
Contained the story of the Froward Son,
Who, careless of the tears his father shed,
A mad career of thoughtless folly run,
In woe to end, although in smiles begun.
It then pourtrayed the misery supreme
He had to bear, when all his wealth was gone,
Till hunger fierce and wretchedness extreme
Made him the husks for swine luxurious food esteem.

XIII.

The story told, moreover, how at last
A better feeling came across his mind,
And how his sire, forgetful of the past,
Looked on the ragged wretch, and wept to find
His son returned to holier ways inclined.
The Cotter's heart beat strongly, for he felt
The moral force of that instruction kind,
Which made his soul with soft emotions melt,
And long to clasp his child ere at his feet he knelt.



Meanwhile from home the Cottager pursued
His lonely walk, where aged hoary trees
Spread o'er his path that sylvan solitude
Which strikes the soul, in solemn scenes like these,
With conscious awe that God the heart e'er sees.
His way led onwards through a mossy dell,
At all times sheltered from the wintry breeze,
Where, as he passed, a burst of sunlight fell
And silvered o'er afresh THE LOVERS' HAUNTED WELL.

XVII.

It was a spot well chosen to uphold
The name it bore, by long tradition known;
For massy oaks, a thousand winters old,
In forms fantastic and uncouth had grown
From jutting rocks or heaps of ragged stone.
Deep down the glen a rocky basin lay,
Where always bright the crystal waters shone;
But ne'er ran o'er and could not get away
Altho' the weeping fount kept dripping night and day.

XVIII.

But that which filled and fixed the anxious sight
With secret awe and dark mysterious dread,—
A fair young girl of alabaster white
Kneeled by the Well and o'er it hung her head
As if its depths contained her lover dead.
Her small white hands she clasped in bitter woe,
From her fair face, hope's last faint beam had fled;
While all the rigid features served to show
How wildly she deplored the youth who lay below.

XIX.

The tale was old, and all the country knew
How, here, two lovers met, in days of yore:
In secret nursed the maiden's passion grew,
For she was rich, and he she loved seemed poor;
And her proud sire betrothed her long before
To one whose birth was equal to her own:
But when was love so blind as to implore
That other eyes should make the virtues known,
He first discerns himself, and thinks he sees alone?

XX.

The high-born youth parental care designed,
A few months hence, that lady fair should wed,
In stranger's garb her worth resolved to find,
Lest he perchance, by erring custom led,
Might take a mate unsuited to his bed:
Her father's pledge the maiden never knew,
Else had she feared her own free path to tread;
Unwarned she ran where love's first impulse drew,
And in her child-like heart a wondrous passion grew.

XXI.

And through these woods the youthful lovers strayed,
Inhaling bliss young lovers only know;
When life shines fair in early charms arrayed,
Without the shadow of approaching woe,
Its chilling gloom across our path to throw.
And day by day they sought this shady dell,
For here their passion first began to grow;
With joy unveiled she loved to hear him tell
The tale that won her heart, beside the Haunted Well.

XXII.

But bliss like theirs was not designed to last;
A plant so fair was sure to fade away;
That brilliant sky would soon be overcast,
And clouds and storms defile the lovely day:
For earthly joys, alas! how short their stay.
There, as they sat, with purest raptures filled,
The bolt was shot, the lover bleeding lay:
The maiden's heart with icy horror thrilled,
Transfixed beside the form her angry sire had killed.

XXIII.

She never spoke, but, kneeling by the Well
In which her lover's bleeding corse was thrown,
Seemed rooted there, as if some sudden spell
Congealed her frame to cold unmelting stone,
Where life or heat would never more be known.
In angry tones her father bade her rise;
She heard him not; her gentle soul had flown
To join her love, where more auspicious skies
Would shine upon their bliss, and love immortalise.

XXIV.

With deep regret and unavailing tears
The father learned how his rash hand had slain
The very man that he had hoped for years
His daughter's hand, but not her heart, might gain,
For that he deemed was labour spent in vain.
But now his child, his only child, was dead,
And on his soul foul murder's bloody stain,
By vengeful conscience filled with constant dread,
And hopeless in his grief, to these old woods he fled.

XXV.

Beneath that tree, and in yon little cave
He made his home—a cheerless dreary place;
There would he sit and look upon the wave,
His own dark story in its depths to trace,
While tears on tears were coursing down his face.
Years roll'd away, and still within his cell
That old man mourned his sufferings and disgrace:
The friends who came, he sought not to repel,
But never from his lips a single sentence fell.

XXVI.

At length the statue of his child was brought
To soothe the torture of his wounded breast;
In foreign lands the costly stone was wrought
With such deep skill, the image seemed possest
Of life itself, in marble whiteness drest.
He gazed—he shook—his haggard eye grew wild,
Unearthly fears his trembling soul opprest:
He looked again, and on the statue smiled,
Then sunk, and dying cried, "I come, I come, my child!"

XXVII.

Since then, 'tis said, their spirits walk this glen
Once every year, the day the lover died;
They neither court, nor shun the gaze of men,
But hand in hand with pensive steps they glide
Till by the brink they all stand side by side.
Then o'er the spot just where the lover fell,
Still cursed and bare with no green grass supplied,
Awhile they sit, as if they seemed to tell
Why first the place was called "THE LOVER'S HAUNTED
WELL."

XXVIII.

This ancient tale, to rustic minds endeared,
The Cotter knew, but doubted, where it said
How once a-year their spirits still appeared,
Like forms of earth in thin white robes arrayed,
To tread with pensive steps this quiet glade:
'Twas his belief their gentle souls had flown
To dwell in joys which no rude storms invade;
And that the sire, by long repentance shown,
Had made his peace with God, and lived before his throne.

XXIX.

But yet he knew how fancy loves to fill
With superstitious sights old spots like these;
Where all around was so serene and still,
That leaves just parting from their parent trees
Were heard to sigh and whisper to the breeze:
Where flickering lights are grouped with heavy shades,
Then lost again before the gazer sees,
How sudden sun-bursts shoot through narrow glades,
And light some moss-clad tree which in a moment fades.

XXX.

There wreaths of mist, in dreamy twilight seen,
Are sleeping still, or waving to and fro,
Now creeping up amid the branches green,
Or squatting close along the ground below,
And now like forms of living things they go:
No wonder, minds, by previous fears opprest,
In these dim scenes should feel their terrors grow,
Till waving mists should seem of life possest,
And branches, wild, uncouth, in ghastly forms be dressed.



With some such thoughts the Cotter left the wood,
Half grieved to quit its cool delightful shade,
And came where on its skirts a cottage stood,
Well thatched with straw, of stud and plaster made,
Time-worn in parts, but not at all decayed.
Before the gate there ran a little brook,
O'er which a plank of rough-hewn wood was laid;
Beneath the porch, with pleased and smiling look,
An old man sat to hear God's true and holy book.

XXXII.

That holy book his lovely grandchild read,—
A gentle girl some twenty summers old;
Her native curls hung clustering round her head,
Or down her neck the auburn tresses roll'd,
And in the sunshine glowed like burnished gold.
Her deep blue eyes had just the violet's shade
Lit up with sense, by modesty controlled,
Where filial love and fond affection made
A mingled charm more sweet than violets e'er displayed.

XXXIII.

Close by the pales, the Cottager remained,
To chat a moment with that fine old man,
Whose gathering age no lack of health sustained,
Although his days beyond the usual span
Of human life full twenty summers ran.
But few events his simple history knew,
For in that cottage first his life began;
From youth through manhood in its walls he grew,
Till time above his brow a snowy mantle threw.

XXXIV.

The few slight changes in his quiet life
Seemed things of course, and scarce disturbed his rest;
The first of these, was when he took a wife,
Of frugal ways and some few pounds possest;
With manners kind and rustic beauty blest.
Twice thirty years as man and wife they dwelt,
With no rude jars their quiet to molest;
And when at last beside her grave he knelt,
He shed not many tears, though truly grieved he felt.

XXXV.

One child they had—a fearless daring boy,
Who scorned the simple life his parents led;
More stirring scenes to him afforded joy,
Where tempting hopes before his mind were spread
In golden hues, by magic fancy bred.
And so from home although with tears he went,
In crowded streets the path of life to tread;
More happy far could he have been content
To stay and end his course where his young days were spent.

XXXVI.

Time brought him back, a strangely altered man,
His health exhausted, prematurely old;
The race of life too swiftly had he ran,
The strife with time too feeble to uphold,
He reached the goal, ere half his days were told.
Sick, sad, subdued, and weary of the strife,
His prospects blighted, and his heart grown cold,
He just returned, at home to end his life,
And left an infant girl, sole relict of his wife.

XXXVII.

That infant girl to womanhood was grown,
The one sole comfort of that old man's breast;
While she perchance had feelings all her own,
In secret nursed and ne'er in words exprest,
Although her cheeks some tender things confest.
Thus when the Cotter asked them both to tea,
More knowing men than they were, might have guessed
That those warm blushes on her cheeks must be
Excited by a cause, more deep than they could see.

XXXVIII.

For neither knew, what she had long time known,
How George, the Cotter's son, had sought her hand,—
That her refusal of his suit alone
Had forced the youth to seek a foreign strand,
And carry arms in an unfriendly land.
How many times she wished that he would come!
And schemes of future bliss she often planned:
Why should he now in distant countries roam,
When he might live with her so happily at home?

XXXIX.

Then came the fear that other eyes might charm,
And wake the flame she smothered in his breast;
At other times her heart would take alarm,
And ghastly wounds or bloody death suggest,
Or else in prison chained by want oppressed.
And thus her thoughts kept wandering to and fro,
And broken visions oft disturbed her rest;
But midst her fears hope still kept whispering low,
"He surely will come back;—why did you let him go?"

XL.

So when her grandsire asked her "should they go?"
Her sparkling eyes shot forth a brilliant ray,
As if they said, "How could you answer, no?
'Twill be so pleasant through the wood to stray,
And hear the birds while sauntering on the way."
'Twas soon agreed; for o'er the old man's heart
Her lightest wishes ruled with sovereign sway:
"Be sure," the Cotter said, "in time to start."
"We will," the old man cried, "and soon at night depart."

XLI.

The Cotter then pursued his lonely walk,
From place to place, beneath the burning sun;
Sometimes he stopped at lonely huts to talk
Of Jesus Christ, God's everlasting Son,
And all the mighty wonders He had done.
He bade the mourner view his smiling face,
Or warned the hardened sinner how to shun
The dreadful torments of that awful place,
Where hope will never smile on those who scorned his grace.

XLII.

'Twas not in vain he laboured thus to save
Untutored souls from ignorance and woe;
For oft through him though sinking to the grave,
Repenting tears from stony eyes would flow,
And dying men their Saviour learned to know:
How oft the mind, by doubt and fear opprest,
Through his instructions felt a sacred glow
Of holy sunshine warming through the breast,
Or full of faith and joy had gone to endless rest.

XLIII.

Now from the road the Cotter turned aside,
And crossed a moor with gorse and bracken gay;
A dreary waste extending far and wide,
To where some colliers' huts were raised of clay,
In one of which a dying woman lay.
The little chamber where she kept her bed,
With age and want of care was giving way,
For long wide rents along the walls had spread,
And rafters cracked in two, hung threatening o'er her head.

XLIV.

The room was small, and scarce contained a thing
Besides the bed, which creaked with crazy age;
Some tattered garments hung across a string,
All patched and rent, as if their utmost stage
Of servitude was merely to presage
Their owner's end, which now was drawing nigh,
With little aid her sufferings to assuage,
Save what her poorer neighbours might supply
From their exhausted stores, until the wretch should die.

XLV.

And die ere long the Cotter saw she must,
For Death was there, and battling for his prey;
Her wasted form, so near akin to dust,
That one slight shock the feeble pulse would stay,
And close the taper's intermittent ray.
Her face appeared a sharp and bony rim,
Her lips were thin and tinged with bluish grey;
The hollow eye with gathering films was dim,
And mortal coldness now had paralysed each limb.



And this was she who, five short years before,
In pride of youth was called "The Village Belle;"
Her cottage dress with simple taste she wore,
Put neatly on, and it became her well,
As many a youth with beating heart could tell.
The country lads contended who should gain
Sweet Mary's smile, and in her grace excel;
But though they ne'er were treated with disdain,
Not one, among them all, her favour could obtain.

XLVII.

Could she not love, that thus she turned aside
Those pretty eyes, so soft and yet so bright? —
How could it be?—they knew it was not pride,
For Mary was not proud, though well she might
Be lifted up, if pride could e'er be right.
How was it then?—had she her heart bestowed
Away from home, on one a stranger quite?
Her rosy cheeks with mantling blushes glowed;—
She loves! — but whom? they asked; — the coming summer showed.

XLIII.

A gay young spark lived in the neighbouring town
Where Mary went, each weekly market day;
Her small straw hat, and dress of russet brown,
First caused the youth some civil things to say,
And by and by to meet her on the way.
He talked of love, of faithful, lasting love,
And never sought to turn her steps astray,
Till Mary's heart at length began to move,
And yielding to his wish, her fate with his she wove.

XLIX.

Their honeymoon was spent without a cloud;
But three months o'er, a trivial change was seen,
His voice was heard at intervals too loud,
And Mary sometimes wondered where he 'd been,
When hours beyond his time would intervene.
"Think HIM to blame! Oh, no! she knew he'd come;
'Twas business kept him, something unforeseen;
Thank God, her Henry did not wish to roam,
His heart was not at ease when absent from his home."

L.

Was this the case?—was Henry still so fond
Of her and home, that he could now forego
Those jovial scenes, which led him far beyond
Where Prudence stood, and threatening future woe?
To all, his fond excuses thundered "No!"
Alas! for him, alas! for his young bride,
The poisoned cup was working, sure, though slow:
If sought, when absent from his Mary's side,
Some festive scene alone his wavering heart supplied.

LI.

But this poor Mary knew not; she believed
Her husband all fond woman's wish might find;
Had she then known, how would her heart have grieved,
That one so generous, one so good and kind,
For pleasure's cup should thus debase his mind!
And so at home she cheered her lonely breast
With pleasing hopes, to all the future blind;
Strong in his love, she thought she should be blest,
When nestling to her heart, her babe would sweetly rest.

LII.

The babe was born—a healthy, lovely child; —
Was ever mother half so full of joy?
Then Henry came, and took the babe, and smiled,
And called his wife a treasure, and his boy
The very thing he wanted, to employ
His vacant time, and please him day by day;
'Twould be so sweet to play with such a toy,
To watch the mind first shed its dawning ray,
Till he could run, and speak, and merry gambols play.

LIII.

What fickle stuff poor human nature is!
One little week from this had scarcely fled,
Ere Henry strayed to scenes of sensual bliss,
And, wild with drink, to further folly led,
Was false the first time to his Mary's bed:
But she, poor thing! still dreaming she was blest
With richer joys, her blooming hopes she fed;
The little nurseling to her heart she prest
With all a mother's joy, to give the babe her breast.

LIV.

Her dream of bliss for months was yet prolonged;
For all her husband told her she believed;
And when he said increasing business thronged
So fast upon him, that, however grieved
His heart might be, he could not get relieved:
The trusting wife, by fond affection swayed,
Without a doubt the lying tale received,
Until his state by fatal chance displayed,
To her affrighted mind the dreadful truth betrayed.

LV.

Induced by one who called herself a friend,
In Henry's absence to behold a play,
She went, but waited not to see the end,
For strange misgivings on her spirit lay,
Lest this was wrong—her husb nd far away:
In hurrying home she passed a narrow street,
Where one faint lamp diffused a sickly ray
Athwart the darkness, where she chanced to meet
Her husband reeling past with drunken staggering feet.

LVI.

Aghast she stood, o'erwhelmed with sudden woe,
Her trembling limbs fast rooted to the ground;
Her brain felt scorched,—no cooling tears would flow,
And o'er her eyes, a darkness most profound
With horrors vaguely filled seemed floating round.
How she reached home was not distinctly said,
But months on months, in dark delirium bound,
She lay unconscious of the gloom which spread,
In still increasing depth, round her devoted head;

LVII.

And when she waked to consciousness once more,
'Twas but to find her darkest fears too true;
Her husband, now more reckless than before,
His vicious course determined to pursue,
Regardless of the ills that must accrue.
For days and weeks he kept himself away,
And left his wife in bitterness to rue
That this low vice her husband's heart should sway.
And blight their home of joy with ruinous decay.

LVIII.

Increasing still with each renewed excess,
The love of drink grew stronger day by day;
What little shame he sometime might possess,
This fatal passion had removed away,
And all his better feelings prostrate lay:
His pride itself, which one time led him on
In dress to shine the gayest of the gay,
Even that last doubtful sentinel was gone,
And his dark mind depraved, of self respect had none.

LIX.

Then Want approached, just like an armèd man,
And tore the garments from his altered frame;
The cheek once healthy, now grew pale and wan,-
The dull sunk eye had lost its former flame,
And sneers and cold contempt sat on his name:
Cast off by those who taught him first to sin,
The first to tempt him and the first to blame; —
He mixed with wretches who rejoiced to win,
Even at the price of life, their worshipped idol, Gin.

LX.

His poor meek wife in solitude remained,
Still toiling on to earn the scanty bread,
Which scarce her own and baby's life sustained,
To rags reduced, and oft by hunger led
To look with gloomy pleasure on the dead:
Yet all the time her lips were never known
To blame the man whose fatal folly bred
Disease and want, and anguish, now upgrown
To such a fatal height, that hope was overthrown.

LXI.

Years gloomed along, each darker than the last,
More sad, more cheerless as they rolled away;
More dark, because the brightness of the past
Still shed at times a faint and flickering ray,
Like broken sunlight o'er a stormy day.
If on her face a sickly smile was seen,
It passed off soon, as if afraid to stay;
Rising perchance from thoughts of what had been
The visions of her mind, in other days serene.

LXII.

If Henry, now a ragged meagre wretch,
To where she lived at some odd times returned,
'Twas not to cheer her, but he came to fetch
Some household thing his feeble wife had earned,
To pawn for drink, for which he ever yearned.
Thus one by one the chairs and tables went,—
Pans, pots and cups were into money turned;
The very garments from her back he rent,
Regardless of her tears, and all for gin was spent.

LXIII.

At length, grown sick, and pinched for want of food,
She lay unable from her bed to rise;
Her little boy, at all times kind and good,
Her only friend, to soothe or sympathise,
Stood close beside her couch with weeping eyes.
The brutal husband to her chamber came
And seized her only blanket, as a prize:
Then laughed, while she, with woman's modest shame
Strove hard to hide her poor emaciated frame.

LXIV.

"Oh father, father!" cried the weeping child,
"Tear not the blanket from poor mother's bed;
What will she do, when wintry winds blow wild,
Sick as she is, and starved for want of bread?"
"What do I care," the frantic villain said:
"I must have drink, and this more gin will buy;
Let go your hold, or I will strike you dead,
And sell you both!—why don't your mother die?—
She'll need no blankets then—they want none in the sky."

LXV.

With these unfeeling taunts he rudely tore
The scanty covering from the struggling boy,
Who fell exhausted on the rugged floor,
Bereft of sense, unable to annoy
With childish strife, his father's fiendish joy.
Before he rose that father strode away,
As if he wished his offspring to destroy:
The wretched wife in speechless anguish lay,
Half tempted to believe 'twas quite in vain to pray.

LXVI.

From that dark hour poor Mary's fate was sealed,
By want, and woe, and care so long opprest;
Beneath the shock her feeble spirits reeled,
Long lingering hope deserted her sad breast:
The grave—the grave—her only place of rest!
One tie remained, a strong and tender tie,—
Her poor dear child must sink by want opprest,
No friendly neighbour could her place supply:
Were he but safe, how soon, how gladly would she die!

LXVII.

" Fear not for him," the Cottager replied,
" My boys shall take him to their little bed ;
Whate'er he needs I will myself provide,
And bring him up till he can earn his bread ;
By honest toil to humble plenty led.
Fear not for him, but let your mind repose
On Christ alone, who once for sinners bled,
And now eternal happiness bestows
On all who trust in Him, since from the grave he rose.

LXVIII

Whilst thus, in tones of homely kindness full,
The good man tried to soothe away her fears,
A gentle calm her spirit seemed to lull,
Half mix'd with doubt, afraid to trust her ears :
And then o'erjoyed she shed a flood of tears.
" Oh God, my God ! I will be thine," she cried ;
" This pays me back the griefs of many years ;
My child, my child ! thy wants shall be supplied :
I die contented now,"—and saying this, she died.

CANTO IV.



A RURAL arbour in the garden stood,
Of beech-wood formed, with scented creepers lined;
And in the midst a grotesque piece of wood,
With sundry stumps of trees in ragged rind,
To serve as chairs, and table, each designed.
Right over head the branches formed a roof
Of curious work, so close together twined,
That human skill could ne'er with web and woof
Compose so fine a mesh, by nature waterproof.

II.

The back and sides were walled with living green,
Where shades harmonious mingling met the view ;
And here and there moss-roses might be seen,
With jasmine or clematis peeping through
The verdant wall, of variegated hue.
A bright laburnum near the entrance stood,
Its yellow ringlets waving to and fro :
And round about a thick impervious wood,
Where clumps of flowers adorned the quiet neighbourhood.

III.

For many a year the Cottager had tried
To add new beauties to this favourite spot;
The choicest flowers he trained against its side,
Each straggling branch he pruned or taught to knot
Its twisting fibres where he might allot.
Shrub, flower, and tree, for balm and beauty known,
Were all united in this rural-grot:
By fostering care to full perfection grown,
That leafy arbour now in matchless beauty shone.

IV.

When sultry suns shot down their fervid beams,
Without a cloud the gaping earth to screen,
And meadowy banks that sloped by sparkling streams
Were parched and brown without a speck of green,
And drooping leaves on every tree were seen:—
The shady arbour still expelled the heat,
No wandering ray e'er came the boughs between,
Kept by the Cotter always trimmed and neat,
On Sabbath days they oft enjoyed their cool retreat.

V.

There, by his wife, the place he always chose,
The Cotter sat, while she dispensed the tea;
Poor George's sweetheart, blushing like a rose,
Took up the child and placed it on her knee,
O'erjoyed and glad with George's friends to be.
The two young girls about the old man hung,
And stroked his hair or chatted merrily;
While both the boys around the stranger clung—
Poor Mary's orphan-child—to feel his loss too young.

VI.

The massy loaf of hearth-baked wheaten bread,
In thick substantial slices wore away,
With fresh-made butter plentifully spread;
While smoking cakes about the table lay
With jam or jelly lined, to grace the day.
The cooling cress their garden stream supplied,
Or lettuce young, spread out in green array:
Thick yellow cream, her humble dairy's pride,
T' enrich their fragrant tea, did the good dame provide.

VII.

While round the board the cheerful cups were sent,
They chatted gravely as became their years:
The old man spoke of some far-gone event,
The Cotter's wife expressed her present fears
About her son, and shed "some natural tears."
The boys and girls were busy with their cakes,
More pleased to eat, than to regale their ears
With tales antique, which fitful memory wakes,
While deep lethargic age with by-gone fancies quakes.

VIII.

Nor, while the youngsters thus their food enjoyed,
Did those in years this pleasing task neglect;
For one and all were seriously employed
With bread or cake, as fancy might direct,
Or appetite suggest less circumspect.
Yet one was there, more joyous than the rest,
Who cake and tea did equally neglect:
And why?—Such pleasant feelings filled her breast,
For in her gentle heart young Love had made his nest.

IX.

And what was food, or what was tea to her?—
Her own sweet fancies fed and filled her mind;
What bright deductions might not hope infer?
Since all around her looked so good and kind,
While no one guessed what secret ties might bind.
If George were here, she thought, but did not say,
What lasting joys they might together find?
"Let him return; I'll try to make him stay:
It was a foolish act, to let him go away."

X.

"Come Kate, my girl," the Cottager exclaimed,
"Your tea is cold—set down that prating boy:
Here, take this cake, which after George is named;
Nay, never blush, you need not now look coy;--
Would he were here to mingle in our joy!"
"I wish he were," half trembled on her lip,
But, quite confused, she snatched the child's new toy,
A penny drum, from which she tried to sip;
Then finding her mistake, let cup and saucer slip.

XI.

The Cotter's thoughts were otherwise engaged,
Or he had seen what Kate would fain conceal:
Not so his wife, whose watchful mind presaged
That her young heart about their son must feel
More than her lips were likely to reveal.
Alarmed at first, she scanned the maiden o'er,
Whose mild blue eyes replied to her appeal;
Their mutual looks a hidden meaning bore,
Well understood by both, both smiled, but nothing more.

XII.

"Shall I," said Kate, "the tea-things take away?"
The mother smiled, and nodding gave consent,
Rejoiced to see her feelings thus display
Their proper course, and as the maiden went,
She thought that George with Kate would be content.
Then nursing up her own fond thoughts, she smiled
Abstracted, pondering o'er the glad event;
Until her husband rose, to please the child,
And let him crop a flower, that grew too large and wild.

XIII.

When Kate returned, the Cottager proposed,
That one and all should join to sing a Psalm;
Since God their Father had to each disclosed
Such proofs of love, that well they might embalm
His name in praise, this summer-evening calm.
No voice dissentient murmured as he rose
And towered above them, like a goodly palm:
With native taste they sang the psalm he chose,
Melodious as it broke the Sabbath's deep repose.

XIV.

The pleasant anthem rising o'er the trees,
And melting sweetly in the deep-blue sky:
Was faintly answered by the trembling breeze
And warbling brook, which gently wandering by,
Sung to the banks whose murmuring leaves reply.
The distant woods grew vocal with their song,
Where long green glades 'twixt old tall trees did lie,
Like hoary aisles in some cathedral strong,
Still making more sublime the sounds their depths prolong.

XV.

"Come now, my boys," the Cotter said, "we'll hear
"The little tales that you have learned to-day;
Here, James, stand up and let your voice be clear,—
Mind well your stops, and take great care to say
In proper tones, each sentence, grave or gay."
The youngster's cheeks a transient blush o'erspread,
And then he coughed to clear his fears away;
More calm at length he lifted up his head,
And in a deep low voice, what follows here, he said.



"The mournful breeze sighs sad through Codnor Hall,
Where nettles wild in broken casements grow;
Through long wide cracks the scattered moonbeams fall,
And rustling weeds wave idly to and fro
O'er broken floors and gaping vaults below.
On roofless walls portentous Ruin scowls;
A dreary change the voiceless chambers show:
For there the fox through each apartment prowls,
Disturbing as he creeps the dreams of sleeping owls.

XVII.

" White hoary moss is coated on the wall;
Dark ivy waves in Beauty's broken bower;
Disjointed stones from sinking arches fall;
The wide hall chimney, open to the shower,
More dreary looks than desolated tower.
Mid long dank weeds the aged thistle grows,
Where once the 'Lady's Garden' used to flower:
Where still is seen a weak and sickly rose,
That o'er the ruined waste a faded beauty throws.

XVIII.

" Uncounted leaves fill up the choaking moat,
Where fallen beams and broken columns lie;
With scattered fragments of a rotten boat,
Confusedly mixed chaotic to the eye,—
Part standing quite erect, but more awry.
The massy gates like skeletons appear,
Whose crumbling dust their outward looks belie:
While gate-ways dark sepulchral terrors wear,
And all about the place is silent, sad, and drear.

XIX.

"How changed the scene, since first Lord Thomas brought
His youthful bride to grace his father's halls!
When bannered knights and bright-eyed ladies sought
The festive joys that sparkled in these walls,
In ceaseless rounds of masquerades and balls.
The new-born days successive pleasures bring;
To join the chase the shrilly bugle calls,
Or minstrels gay their merry roundels sing,
And loud obstreperous mirth makes roof and rafters ring.

XX.

"Month rolled on month, and years on years were piled,
Without abatement of that tide of joy:
Around their path the rosy moments smiled;
No cloud arose their sunshine to destroy,
Or accident befell, that might annoy.
Wealth, honour, state and pleasure at command,
A thousand menials toiled in his employ:
O'er hill and dale his wide domains expand,
'Twould take a summer's day, to ride across his land.

XXI.

"What ails Lord Thomas? Gloomy, dark, severe;
By fits he starts or hurries up and down;
Now stops to gaze, his wild eyes full of fear,
Then starting forth, he darts an angry frown,
Or laughs in scorn his inward fears to drown.
What ails Lord Thomas?—once so blythe and gay,
So rich and great, so full of fair renown?
Alas! for him the passion rose for play:
And now the fatal dice have thrown his lands away.

XXII.

"Where hides he now? Rude strangers claim his Hall;
His wife hath sickened like a blighted flower;
Those summer-friends unmoved behold his fall,
Who hung about him in his day of power:
And now assist his substance to devour.
Where hides he now? Behold yon roofless shed,
To storms exposed, and soaking with the shower:
There may you see the great Lord Thomas dead,
Whose famished looks declare, he died for want of bread."[4]

XXIII.

When thus the boy his gloomy tale had done,
And stood in doubt, half-pleased and half-ashamed;
The Cotter's wife put forth her younger son,
But hoped his story might be better framed
Than James's tale, which he had rightly named.
The timid boy looked mildly in her face,
And saw the smile his mute expression claimed;
Assured at once, he sunk in her embrace,
Then blushing to the brow, he took his brother's place.

XXIV.

"Once on a time there lived a little boy,[5]
So mild and good, he never learned to frown;
His gentle heart was always full of joy,
And full of love; and love was like a crown
Of glory round his brow, from God sent down.
Whoever saw him, loved him, for his eyes
Were so confiding, they were sure to drown
All cold reserve in gladness and surprise,
That one was found on earth, so like them in the skies.

XXV.

" The little birds all knew him, and would hop
About his path, and peep into his face ;
And one sweet robin on the rail would stop
Till he came up, and shewed of fear no trace,
But followed him about from place to place.
The sheep and cows seemed pleased to see him go,
And rabbits wild about his feet would race ;
The very fish by instinct seemed to know
The goodness of this boy, and signs of joy would show.

XXVI.

" It chanced one day, as down a lane he passed,
In converse sweet with butterflies and flowers ;
He found a lamb by envious thorns held fast,
Despite its piteous cries for many hours :
Its woolly coat all wet with driving showers.
' My pretty lamb, I'll set you free,' he cried,
And then to set it free he strained his powers ;
' Have patience, dear—how fast the thorns are tied :
Be gentle,—gentle now—or you will tear your side.'

XXVII.

"That little lamb and he at once were friends,
And where he went, his woolly friend would go:
No matter who beside the lamb attends,
It never leaves him, let who will say no,
But clings about his legs its love to show.
Bright sunny days together they would pass,
Now romping, full of play, now wandering slow;
And when fatigued, young thoughtless things, alas!
They both would fall asleep together on the grass.

XXVIII.

"And thus they lived for many, many days,
Until at last the child was taken ill;
His eyes grew dull—his head he could not raise,
But on his mother's knee lay sad and still:
And sometimes burned like fire, and then grew chill.
They laid him down within his little bed,
And brought the Leech to try his healing skill;
But fast and fast the gathering fever spread,
And soon his speech grew wild with lightness in his head.

XXIX.

" And all the time that little boy was ill,
The patient lamb beneath his window lay;
It rained—it blew—but there the lamb lay still,
The live-long night, though cold, and all the day,
And never once was seen to go away. .
They brought him milk—they brought him dainty bread,
Twas all in vain; the food untouched might stay:
But when they came he reared his languid head,
And moaned as if to ask 'Is my young master dead?'

XXX.

" At length the fever left him, and the child
Seemed just awakened from a troubled sleep;
His mild blue eyes he opened, and he smiled
So sweetly on them, with a love so deep,
That all who saw him could not choose but weep.
'Where is my lamb, my pretty lamb,' he cried;
'I thought I heard him near the window creep;
Have I been ill? What's this upon my side?
Dear mother, bring my lamb!'—'He 's coming,' she replied.

XXXI.

" And oh ! the joy those two young things displayed,
Once more to be together ;—twas a sight
Where innocence, and love, and joy pourtrayed
What man should be, were his affections right ;
And what he may be by the Saviour's might.
Thrice holy Lamb ! how great thy love must be,
To bleed for those who did thy goodness slight ;
And since for man thou diedst upon the tree,
Oh ! teach my trusting heart to cleave and cling to thee."

XXXII.

" Thank God!" said Kate, her eyes suffused with tears,
" The child, the lamb are both preserved alive !
While they were ill, I had so many fears
Lest, after all, they neither should survive,
To show the world how hearts in love can thrive."
" Why, Kate, my girl !" her aged grandsire said,
"To fall in love, I think thou'lt soon contrive
Thou speak'st so warm."—Kate blushing hung her head,
Half smiling to herself, but not a word she said.

XXXIII.

"Now for a walk," the Cottager exclaimed.—
"A walk, a walk!" his laughing girls replied;
The cheerful wife no vain excuses framed,
But dressed herself, while Kate each bonnet tied,
And took the youngsters frisking by her side.
Then down the lane, the Cotter and his guest
Went sauntering first,—the poor old dog their guide:
The three young boys about their mother prest,
And Mary's orphan-child came thronging with the rest.

XXXIV.

The clear round sun was sinking down the sky,
And leafy trees extensive shadows threw;
Majestic clouds like gorgeous drapery
Stretched far away in heaven's imperial blue,
Till, lost in air, they melted from the view.
Above the woods uprose a distant spire,
Where round and round the glossy rooks still flew:
The glittering vane glowed like a bird of fire,
Uprising towards the sky to teach us to aspire.

XXXV.

O'er grassy vales with cot and orchard strowed,
Where sheep and cows through clover-pastures stray;
The distant hills with golden sunshine glowed,
While clear smooth streams like molten silver lay,
'Twixt meadow-lands enriched with cocks of hay.
And all around was so serene and still
That not a leaf was quivering on the spray:
The gurgling stream that turns the clacking mill,
Infected by the heat, rolled lazy down the hill,

XXXVI.

Then faintly brawling underneath the trees
It here and there caught glimpses of the sky;
And made low answer to the murmuring bees
Which to and fro laboriously did fly,
Still rifling sweet-lipped flowers that grew hard by.
Far in the distance sheep-bells tinkled clear,
And now and then was heard the lapwing's cry:
While many a sound came softened on the ear
From song of woodland bird, and low of brindled steer.

XXXVII.

Through scenes like these they sauntered slowly on,
From field to field, oft stopping as they went,
Some curious herb or lofty tree to con,
While now and then each gladsome heart would vent
Wild bursts of joy, or dying flower lament.
Now here, now there, the happy children sped,
And each new joy a new excitement lent;
Now o'er the path large heaps of flowers they spread,
And then in mimic fear across the fields they fled.

XXXVIII.

"Come, boys," said Kate, "beyond this hill there stands
A fine old tree that's called 'The Lover's Oak;'"
Up sprung the lads, and seized her glowing hands,
And like young deer across the field they broke,
Or youthful steeds that never felt the yoke.
They gained the top, they scampered down the side,
To try their speed each other did provoke;
On, on each went with still increasing stride,
And scarcely could they stop, when o'er the valley wide.



"This tree," said Kate—but ere she more could say,
Her features changed,—her rosy cheeks grew pale,
Her whole regard was fixed on one who lay
Beneath the tree to rest his body frail,
Where grief or sickness told a heavy tale.
His pallid cheeks and deeply-sunken eyes,
Thin faltering limbs, showed sickness must prevail;
And there exposed, with none to heed his cries,
Exhausted on the ground, the sickly creature lies.

XL.

"What ails you, Kate?" the boys astonished cried:
"Are you unwell?—you shake and shiver so."
"No—not unwell—not now," poor Kate replied,
"But who is that?—It must be!—Is it?—no!
And yet it must be—yes! it is, I know:—
Oh! George," she cried, "you're very, very ill!"
"I am indeed," he answered, murmuring low;
"But yet perhaps I may recover still
If you"—"Hush! hush!" she cried, "they're coming down the hill."

XLI.

"It matters not," the sickly youth replied,
"Who comes or goes,—I care for none but thee:
How oft in dreams I've wandered by thy side,
Through these sweet scenes in converse kind and free;
And wearying waked an exile still to be.
These pleasant scenes, for which I fondly pined,
Just as they were in former years I see;
And this old oak hath still upon its rind
The name of her I loved,—both then and now unkind."

XLII.

" Nor then nor now the least unkind to thee,
Ill-judging youth !—I loved thee far too well;
If thou hadst seen, what now thou shalt not see,
Thou might'st have known what maidens should not tell,
Although their hearts may nigh to bursting swell.
But thou art ill!—'Tis idle to affect
The least reserve, when candour may dispel
The sickly doubt that leads thee to suspect
That I, who love so much, thy suit should still reject."

XLIII.

As lamps half-mouldering dimly in a shrine,
In doubtful strife, heave flickering to and fro;
When newly trimmed with sudden radiance shine,
And all around their cheerful beamings throw,
Till shrine and saint with mellow brightness glow:
A new-born joy o'er George's features spread;
His care-worn face much younger seemed to grow;
His sad desponding looks at once had fled,
And from his sparkling eyes, a sudden light was shed.

XLIV.

"And am I thus repaid for all my pains?"
Exclaimed the youth,—"thrice happy, happy day!
New life is pulsing through my throbbing veins,
The sickness of my heart is fled away:
My soul is glad, and nature looks more gay!
Oh! let me ever, ever thus be blest;
To distant lands I shall not wish to stray;
In thy dear arms my fainting heart shall rest,
And all my griefs be hushed reposing on thy breast."

XLV.

"Hey-day! what's here?" the Cottager exclaimed,
As, unperceived, he laid his hand on Kate;
She started back, and like a bird half-tamed,
Would fly away to gain her former state;
But checked by love, she there resolved to wait.
Meantime the Cotter cast his wondering eyes
From Kate to George, in doubt and self-debate;
Till in his heart he felt the father rise,
And pure unmingled joy o'ercame his first surprise.

XLVI.

"My son! my son! and is it thus," he cried,
"Thus sick on foot they send thee back to me?—
Our country's soldiers ought to be supplied
With better means their distant homes to see,
Than those who rule have now conferred on thee.
But never mind, thou shalt not go again
To risk thy life, whoe'er may disagree;
Let foolish France attack disordered Spain,
And quarrel as they list, thou shalt at home remain."

XLVII.

"Aye! that he shall, my poor dear sickly boy!"
His mother cried, first bursting into tears;
And then she laughed, o'ercome with sudden joy:
And this again was darkened o'er with fears
Lest George should die, so sickly he appears.
"But no, no, no! thou wilt not die," she cried.—
"Not yet, I hope," said George, "for many years"—
Then turning round, he looked on Kate and sighed,
And whispered in her ear—"if thou wilt be my bride."

XLVIII.

Meantime the children capered with delight,
And clapped their hands, and scampered to and fro:
First one drew near to see that all was right,
Then back he ran, and placed them in a row,
To whisper in their ears—"'Tis George, I know!"
And then they clapped their little hands anew,
And shouted loud, their greater joy to show:
The youngest child, scarce knowing what to do,
First kissed the poor old dog, then clapped and shouted too.

XLIX.

The first strong feelings of surprise and joy
Subsided soon in settled calm delight;
And then they thought what means they'd best employ
To move the youth, whose sick and weakly plight
Made all things seem a toil, however light.
First one proposed to fetch a horse and cart,
Another thought the horse alone was right;
"I'll walk," said George, and whispering Kate apart,
"I feel much stronger now, since you have eased my heart."

L.

"Here, lean on me," the Cotter kindly said,
"For I am strong, and well can bear thy weight:"
George took his arm, but turning round his head,
With beaming eyes, he gently beckoned Kate,
And said he wanted her to make all straight.
The blushing girl was quickly by his side,
Exulting most, they had not come too late;
"For if," she said, and as she said it, sighed—
"If there he'd lain all night exposed, he must have died."

LI.

Supported thus, they slowly wound along
The nearest path, which swept the river's side;
Where gurgling waves sent forth their evening-song
In gentle tones across the glassy tide:
Till on the banks 'mid rustling reeds they died.
The clear smooth stream threw back the purple skies;
So mirror-like the level waves did glide:
Save here and there, where fish were seen to rise,
And dimpling circles make while catching evening flies.

LII.

The full round sun, just touched the distant hill,
His crimson face expanding, seemed to glow
With tenfold beauty, while he lingered still,
As if reluctant halting, moving slow;
Until by force compelled, he sunk below.
Majestic clouds had gathered round his head,
And when he went, their massive sides could show,
In many a form of deeply glowing red,
The glory of that light his parting beams had shed.

LIII.

With frequent stops the weary youth to rest,
They crept along till on the bridge they stood;
The sun's last beams were fading in the West,
And less distinct appeared the distant wood,
And rising mist obscured the dusky flood.
"Thank God!" said George, his dark eyes bright with tears,
"How oft of this I've thought 'mid scenes of blood:
Just, just the same, as in my younger years,
Amid the quiet trees, my native cot appears."



When near the porch the sickly youth they brought,
With new delight his trembling bosom shook;
For as they stood, the pleasing view they caught
Of grandam reading in that holy book,
From whence her joy—her hope—her all she took.
A glimmering taper on the table shone,
Which in the gathering twilight made her look
Like some old saint in monumental stone:
So calm, she seemed, and rapt, while thus with God alone.

LV.

They entered in, and George before her came,
Whereat she raised her head in vague surprise;
With vacant look she stared to hear her name,
Then, filled with doubt, she from her chair did rise
And gazed again, and then she rubbed her eyes.
"What! is it thou, my long, long wandering child?"
She stammered forth at length with sobs and cries:
"Come near, my boy:" George came and gently smiled,
And then she laughed aloud hysterically wild.

LVI.

Meantime his mother bustled up and down,
And soon prepared the comfortable meal;
With apron donned above her Sunday gown,
She laid the cloth—placed knife and fork, and steel,
While Kate assisted with instinctive zeal.
The large brown loaf, cold meat, and homely pie,
Were not allowed to make a vain appeal;
But one and all with serious looks did ply,
Industrious and intent themselves to gratify.

LVII.

The supper done, they clustered round the fire,
Its warmth unneeded; but the cheerful blaze
Seemed so attractive as the flames rose higher,
That young and old could not refuse to gaze
And vent their joy in varying homely phrase.
Thrice hallowed spot! more dear than splendid dome:
Well may we love thee, and well may we praise;
For on his hearth, without a wish to roam
An English bosom beats with deepest love of home.

LVIII.

Not oft forgetful of her thrifty rules,
The wife resolved for once to give a treat;
And while they fixed the settle, chairs and stools,
She brought a bottle from its dark retreat:
A large stone jar it seemed, with dust replete;
From this she poured a liquor, dark, yet fine,
Then stirred the flames the spicy drink to heat;
A fragrant steam unfolded her design,
And soon, well-pleased, they saw the home-made elder-wine.

LIX.

The cheerful group with smiling faces sat
And sipped their wine: too hot for drinking fast,
Indulging freely in their harmless chat;
While now and then fond looks the mother cast
On George, much bettered by his late repast.
His pleasant looks went cheerly to her heart;
Her fears were gone—her boy was come at last:
He would no more from home and kindred part,
And then with quivering joy the tears were seen to start.

LX.

"Nay, do not weep," said George, with moistening eye
And faltering voice, "I shall not fight again;
Let those that list to fields of battle fly,
And seek for glory 'mid those heaps of slain
Which taint the air, unburied on the plain.
For me the charm can never more revive:
I woke to reason on the bed of pain,
And saw how States by peaceful arts may thrive,
Or sink in ruin when in maddening wars they strive.

LXI.

"Oh! I have seen such sights of death and woe—
Such havoc wild in city, camp and field;
When roused to fury trampling on the foe,
Men crushed their fellows who refused to yield
Those sacred rights by Freedom's God revealed.
Down fall the virtues—down the feelings fall,
With fiendish joy their brutal power they wield:
Wife—daughter—child—destruction seizes all,
And man is man no more—his milk is turned to gall.

LXII.

"My very soul now sickens as I think
Of those sad scenes that passed before mine eye;
When, man by man, I saw my comrades sink,
With haggard look and wild heart-rending cry,
To live in pain, or else unpitied die.
I too had died, my mother, were it not
That thou hadst sent this precious book to lie
Beside my heart,—a providential spot;
For see! its well-bound back still holds the fatal shot."

LXIII.

" Thanks, thanks to HIM who ordereth all things well !"
The mother sobbed, half frantic with delight :
She laughed—she cried—and on his neck she fell,
" I knew," she said, " that God would make it right,
For parents' prayers are precious in his sight !"
And then again she clasped him to her breast,
And sobbed aloud, until exhausted quite ;
Her tear-filled eye upon her son did rest
With love so deep, that words its fulness ne'er exprest.

LXIV.

Nor could the children, when their mother wept,
Help weeping too, although they knew not why ;
And as for Kate, although she silent kept
And hung her head where none her face could spy,
Yet joyous drops fell streaming from her eye.
A single tear stole down the Cotter's cheek,
In which perchance far greater strength might lie
Than outward signs, however strong, could speak,
For his emotions deep made all expressions weak.

LXV.

Their feelings calmed, the Cotter rose and said,
"Now let us pray!" and kneeling down they prayed
That God would still His saving mercies spread
About their path, and check them if they strayed,
Or felt their hearts by sinful feelings swayed.
For all His gifts they might attempt to raise
Their feeble songs, in grateful terms arrayed,
But how could words declare his gracious ways?
With reverence they adored, and silence spoke his praise.

NOTES.

Note 1. Page 28.

"And Rome's imperial pride, with one gigantic blow."

When we read the history, or view the relics of those religious buildings which were overthrown by the rude hands of our early reformers, a feeling of regret will sometimes steal over us, that so many splendid specimens of art should have been thus destroyed; and yet, on more mature reflection, we may see the policy of their proceedings, as it would have been almost impossible to have changed the system of worship, if the temples had been allowed to stand. The force of habit and the influence of the senses were both powerfully in favour of the old system, and it required a total disruption of its external symbols, before the more refined truths of the reformed religion could be brought to take root in the minds of the people. The lovers of art may have cause to regret the overthrow of abbeys and churches, but the lovers of truth and freedom should rejoice, that with them was destroyed the most pernicious slavery that ever disgraced the world.

Note 2. Page 31.

"Despite large boards, with prohibitions vile."

The practice of stopping the foot-paths across the fields has been carried to a most vexatious extent, in many rural districts, without any regard to the convenience of the public, or the right established by long usage. In many cases, where the neighbouring squires have been of congenial views, they have unscrupulously exercised their power,—removed the stile,—fenced up the place with thorns, and stuck up a large board, with the notice, that "This road is stopped by order of the magistrates." If you enquire, who are the magistrates, the answer is—the very men through whose property the road runs, and who have thus perverted their magisterial appointments to serve their own personal interests. One case I remember particularly well, when residing in the country, where the stoppage of an old foot-path occasioned a walk of more than

three miles on the dusty turnpike to get to a friend's house, instead of half a mile through some beautifully wooded fields.

The first time I went that way, after the stile was removed, I found a grey-headed man, upwards of eighty years old, standing against the place, with an expression of mingled grief and anger, I shall not soon forget:—"I have passed this way," said he, "for more than seventy years, and the first time was with my grandfather, who had used it since he was a child—and it is very hard to be shut out now."—"It is," I replied, removing the thorns to let him pass, "but you will not need it much longer." He faltered slowly on his way, and the path still remains closed.

Note 3. Page 65.

"The Stranger's Pew."

I once passed a Sunday at a very rural village on the borders of Wales, and on going into the Church, (one of the most ancient I ever saw,) was greatly delighted to see a large pew fitted up with cushions and books, on which was painted "The Stranger's Pew." Being a stranger, the door was opened for me as a matter of course; and while waiting for the commencement of the service, I could not help contrasting this homely charity with the cold politeness with which I had been allowed to stand in the aisles of some of our stately metropolitan churches, and wishing that they would imitate these rustic Christians in their kindness to the stranger.

Note 4. Page 122.

"Whose famished looks declare, he died for want of bread."

In the neighbourhood of Codner Castle, Derbyshire, there is a story prevalent, that the last of the Zouch family, formerly owners of very extensive domains in that part of the country, died of want, as related in the text.

Note 5. Page 123.

The titles of the two tales are omitted, to avoid breaking up the regularity of appearance in the body of the work. The first is called "The Desolate Hall," and the second "The Child and the Lamb."

London: Printed by Stewart and Murray, Old Bailey.